



Prawns with Strange-Flavoured Dressing

The odd name of this classic Sichuan sauce comes about because the combination of flavours in it is a strange one that shouldn't work, yet does. Strange or not, this salty, sweet, nutty, tangy, spicy, numbing dressing definitely tastes great! Buy pure Chinese sesame paste (some is mixed with peanuts), or substitute tahini. Prawns are size-graded according to how many are in a pound (a system that remains despite modern metric measurements); a medium-sized king prawn is a U12/15, meaning there are 12–15 prawns to the pound (so each prawn weighs an average 35g). The cooking time below applies to U12/15s and should be adjusted for different sizes; I find that about 1 minute/35g timed from when the prawn is added to the boiling water gives the best result.

Serves 2



INGREDIENTS

- 8 medium-sized green prawns
- 1.5 litre water
- ⅓ cup fine salt
- ¼ cup Shaoxing cooking wine
- Salt flakes, to taste
- 1 small Lebanese cucumber, shredded (or cut into julienne)
- 2 green onions, finely sliced on the diagonal
- ½ teaspoon Sichuan peppercorns, toasted and ground
- 1 teaspoon sesame seeds, toasted
- Steamed jasmine rice, for serving

Strange-flavoured Dressing

- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon Chinkiang vinegar
- 1 tablespoon castor sugar
- 1 tablespoon cold water
- ¼ cup Chinese sesame paste (including about 1 tablespoon of the oil from the top)
- ¼ cup Sichuan chilli sauce (about half oil and half sediment)
- 2 teaspoons sesame oil

METHOD

1. Remove prawns from fridge 30 minutes or so before cooking to allow them to come to room temperature.
2. Place the water, salt and Shaoxing in a saucepan and bring to the boil.
3. Place prawns into the boiling water and boil, for 1 minute.
4. Remove from the water and set aside to cool (don't refresh in cold water).
5. Meanwhile, make Strange-flavoured Dressing: stir soy sauce, vinegar, sugar and water together until sugar dissolves. Whisk in sesame paste, chilli sauce and sesame oil to combine well. Set aside.
6. When prawns are cool, peel and devein them. Refrigerate until cold then cut into bite-sized chunks.
7. Place cucumber, green onion and prawn meat in a bowl with about half the Dressing, enough to coat generously, and toss well to combine.
8. Mound onto a platter, sprinkle with Sichuan pepper and sesame seeds and serve with steamed rice and remaining Strange-flavoured Dressing on the side.